



THE **BLUE JAY**

Official Bulletin
of The
YORKTON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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To foster an active interest
in every branch of nature study,
and to promote the conservation
of all wild life; also to act
as a connecting link
between nature lovers in

Saskatchewan

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Y. N. H. S. NOTES

On Nov. 20, Yorkton members held a display in the new schoolroom in the basement of St. Andrew's United Church of their activities during the past summer. Exhibits included an interesting selection of plants collected by Mrs. Priestly from the whole district for our society's herbarium and from the Rousay Lakes for Ducks Unlimited. Miss Gladys Fraser had specially arranged some of her insect specimens to illustrate the different families of the insect world while Stuart Houston set up one of the actual traps he uses in duck banding - complete even to the "lead" of barley at the entrance! Collections of birds nests, photographs, maps, charts, and scrap-books were also shown. The display was very well attended and gave us an opportunity to reach people whom we had not realized were interested in wildlife.

Our December activity was centered around the return visit of Dick Bird, A.R.P.S., F.Z.S., to Yorkton. As on the occasion of his previous visit nearly two years ago, we worked Mr. Bird very hard. In addition to the public lecture in St. Andrew's United Church on Dec. 5, Mr. Bird also showed his pictures to all three Yorkton public schools, the Yorkton Collegiate and St. Joseph's College. After finishing at Yorkton, Mr. Bird went on to speak at Saltcoats on the evening of Dec. 6. We wish all our members could see Mr. Bird's outstanding motion pictures of nature in Saskatchewan - all taken in color.

We have had several requests for copies of the "Blue Jay" from institutions on this side of the Atlantic, but it was quite a surprise to get a letter just before Christmas from the British Museum of Natural History, South Kensington, London, England, requesting copies of our publications. Their librarian, it seems, had recently been asked for a Contribution No. 2 of the Yorkton Natural History Society (Maurice G. Street's List of the Birds of Nipawin).

Some of the younger members and their friends undertook a count of the muskrat houses at the Rousay Lakes for Ducks Unlimited on Nov. 19. The count on the Upper Lake yielded 353 houses, as compared to 169 the previous year, while that of the Lower Lake was found to have increased from 25 the year before to 223 this year. This increase was helped, of course, by the influx of muskrats from outside points due to the ponds drying up last summer, but taking the heavy spring trapping into account, the increase is remarkable.

We are very glad to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Cliff Shaw as new residents to Yorkton. Mr. Shaw is a keen naturalist and was formerly secretary of the Regina Natural History Society, so Regina's loss is our gain.

We were also glad to meet Mrs. Marion Nixon when she was in Yorkton for a few days in October. As is usual when nature lovers get together, we did not have nearly enough time to discuss half the things we should have liked to have talked over with Mrs. Nixon.

We extend our best wishes for every success to "Spade and Screen" - the official organ of the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society. Similar in set up to the "Blue Jay", the purpose of "Spade and Screen" is to make collectors and students of Stone Age implements (artifacts) on the prairies become better acquainted with one another, and to act as a recording agency for archaeological "finds" in the West. Membership fee outside the city of Regina is 50 cents and will include copies of "Spade and Screen." Sec.-Treas.: Miss I.E. Barker, Willows Court, Regina.

BIRD-BANDING
by C. Stuart Houston

John James Audubon was the first man in North America to band birds, when in 1803 he placed silver wire around the legs of a brood of phoebes. Two of these birds returned to the same place the following year.

Shortly after the turn of this century, ornithologists decided that some method of marking birds would produce valuable data which could be obtained in no other way. Accordingly, in 1909, the American Bird Banding Association was formed. In 1920, the U.S. Biological Survey (now the Fish & Wildlife Service), realizing the tremendous possibilities of banding, took over this work. Canadian banders use U.S. bands, but in addition to the forms they make out for the use of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, they must make out duplicate records for the National Parks Bureau of the Canadian government, and send in requests for permits, bands, etc. through Ottawa.

To band birds in Canada, one must obtain a permit from the National Parks Bureau, which is also signed by the Game Commissioner for his particular province. Recommendations from two recognized ornithologists are also necessary, and it is required that the person be at least eighteen years of age. Bands and forms are then issued free of charge, but all equipment must be made or purchased by the bander himself.

All bands bear a number, and the inscription: "Notify Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C." (Older bands referred to the Biological Survey). On smaller bands, the legend is abbreviated and the address "Washington, D.C." is placed on the inside of the band. The bands are made of aluminum, and come in ten sizes. If the correct size is properly placed on the bird's leg, there is no danger to the bird, and due to its extreme lightness, it doesn't cause the bird any concern.

Well over three million of these bands have been placed on North American birds since 1920. Some 1700 people now devote their spare time to this work without remuneration. Many interesting facts about the migration, longevity, and habits of many species have been brought to light through banding. One of the most recent and most notable of these, was the discovery of the wintering place, hitherto unknown to scientists, of the Chimney Swift, when bands from 13 of these birds were recovered from Peru last spring.

Bird-banding records are of scientific value, and accordingly a thorough knowledge of all the birds in one's district is necessary. No conscientious bander ever places a band on a bird's leg unless he is positive as to its identity. Records, accurately listing the band number, species of bird banded, date and place of banding, and the sex and age of the bird when known, must be kept.

At first, the majority of the birds were banded as juveniles still in the nest. Later, simple Drop Traps were developed. With this type, bait is placed under a screen box, with one end held up by a stick. When a bird enters beneath the trap, a watcher, some distance away, pulls a string which is attached to the stick.

Automatic traps, of many types, have proved their worth. The best and simplest are those employing funnels or a simple tripping arrangement. Once the bird passes through the funnel into the trap, it is usually unable to find its way out. In other traps, the bird trips the door shut when it steps on a perch or wire within the trap.

No story of bird-banding would be complete without some mention of the late Jack Miner. He was a pioneer in the true sense of the word, and did a great deal to popularize banding and conservation with the general public. Concentrating exclusively on ducks and geese, he made his own bands, with his name on one side and a verse of scripture on the other.

Every dead bird seen should be examined carefully. It may carry a band. Such a band may have been placed on the bird a few weeks before by one of our Saskatchewan banders, or it might have been put on ten years before in Louisiana. Flatten the band out and mail it to the Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. If the bird is living, carefully record the full band number, and release the bird with a band on it. In either case report when and where you found the bird, and any other information you may know about its cause of death, etc. A reply from Washington

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BIRD-BANDING (continued)

will be received, telling the finder when the bird was banded and by whom, as well as its species, age and sex. They also notify the bander that his bird has been found and by whom.

At the present time, permits are not being issued to new banders due to the shortage of labor and material for bands. However, if any of our members feel they would enjoy this interesting hobby, we would advise them to write now and tell the National Parks Bureau that they are interested, so they may start at the first opportunity. Anyone hearing of the finding of a banded bird should make sure that it is reported to Washington. It may prove to be an unusual or important record.

DUCK DISASTER

Four years ago a "rain" of ducks was reported from Foam Lake one foggy night early in November, when Buffleheads dropped out of the sky over an area of several miles. A similar occurrence took place this Fall a few miles north-east of Clair and an account of the happening was sent us by A. Sloan, who obtained the details from Don Knox, a farmer in the district.

It seems that the week beginning Nov. 12 was very foggy and the whole countryside was heavily covered with hoar-frost. On Nov. 15, Mr. Knox decided to burn a straw pile and started the fire about 7.30 in the evening. The next morning when driving along the highway he noticed a few dead ducks, but thought nothing of this as they could easily have collided with the telephone wires in the fog of the night before. However, a little way further on he noticed a family of Indians picking up something in his fields and he immediately investigated.

To his amazement, he found hundreds of dead and dying ducks scattered all over his field and that of a neighbor. Some had smashed bodies, others broken legs and wings, while some birds, although uninjured, seemed stunned and completely dazed. The Indians carried away a wagon box full of dead birds and came back for more. Other nearby residents rescued some of the living birds and took them home, releasing them in a few days. Mr. Sloan said he saw a sackful of the dead birds and they all appeared to be Lesser Scaups.

As for the cause of the disaster - The most plausible explanation seems to be that the ducks were confused with the fog to start with, and then the light from the bonfire illuminated the hoar-frost on the stubble, so that the ducks mistook it for water. They then tried to land at the same rate of speed with which they come in on water. The result on frozen ground was disastrous.

Queried as to how many ducks might have been involved, Mr. Knox estimates that there were between five and six thousand at the very least. A small percentage of the birds were uninjured; these were unable to take off out of the stubble but, when picked up and thrown into the air, made a successful get-away. Of course only a few were saved in this manner, and Mr. Knox fears that many fell prey to weasels and other predators as a few days later he found many bodies from which the heads had been eaten off.

In both disasters - at Clair this year and at Foam Lake in 1940 - fog seems to have been one of the major factors, although the Foam Lake occurrence presented several extremely puzzling points. If anyone has ever come across a similar duck tragedy it would be most interesting to hear the details.

The very heavy southward flight of ducks this year has already been noted in the newspapers. H.M. Rayner, Ituna, reported well over 10,000 Lesser Scaups on the lakes between Lebreton and Fort Qu'Appelle on Nov. 2. Stuart Houston noted large numbers of this species still present Nov. 12. -12-

BIRD NOTES

Best bird record for 1944 was probably made by C. Stuart Francis, Torch River, who had the good fortune to discover a Solitary Sandpiper sitting on four eggs in an old Cedar Waxwing's nest. The Solitary Sandpiper is a spring and fall migrant across the prairies and for years its nesting habits were a complete mystery. Finally one of these birds was found nesting in an old robin's nest in northern Alberta and it was learned that the Solitary Sandpiper lays its eggs in the deserted tree-nests of other birds instead of on the ground which is the normal rule among shore birds! Very few nesting records have, however, been obtained, as the Solitary Sandpiper favors secluded ponds and streams in the northern woods, so Mr. Francis made quite an ornithological find.

Wm. Niven, Sheho, writes that Starlings appeared in the district early last spring and that several pairs nested in trees on his farm, appropriating old nesting holes formerly used by Purple Martins. "The Martins," he writes, "coming later in the season had to seek other places to nest. Unfortunately the starlings seem here to stay as I have seen flocks of as many as two dozen birds this Fall."

Mr. Niven's note illustrates one of the worst aspects of the advent of the Starling in the West - namely their habit of ousting desirable native birds, particularly bluebirds, tree swallows and purple martins, all of which nest in holes and cavities. M.G. Street, Nipawin, also reports that Starlings are becoming increasingly abundant in that area during the summer months, but that the majority (about 99%) migrate in the Fall. (Usually Starlings are year-round residents wherever they occur. Are the birds which reach more northerly points adopting the migratory habit? - Editor).

Crossbills are among the less common winter bird visitors, so it was of interest to hear of quite a large flock being seen in Regina this Fall. One of the first to observe them was Charles I. Thacker of the Industrial School for Boys, who writes: "I thought you would like to know that yesterday (Nov. 1) Mrs. Thacker and I saw about twenty Red Crossbills. They were in the spruce trees in front of the house and it was indeed interesting to see them manipulating their twisted bills into the cones to get at the seeds. They were absolutely fearless and paid no attention to us. We stood within three or four feet of them and then called some of the boys to come and look at them. One little chap could not resist the temptation to try and pick one up when it came near him, and, believe it or not, he succeeded!" (Note: There are two species of Crossbills, the Red Crossbill and the White-winged Crossbill. The latter is more rosy in color and has well-defined white bars on the wings. Female birds of both species are dull olive-gray birds with a suggestion of yellow.)

Apparently Hairy Woodpeckers in this province appreciate the food value of Saskatchewan wheat! Mrs. J. Hubbard, Jr. tells us that the "Grenfell Sun" carried a letter in the summer complaining of a woodpecker making holes in a granary and she suspects it may have been their old pal of last winter, the Hairy which was so destructive to a granary on the Hubbard farm! She states that she saw another granary "where a Hairy had gone along the edge of a board opening up a crack six or more inches long." Mrs. W. Roach also reports a similar occurrence at Okla where a Hairy drilled quite a long opening at the joint of two boards in several places so that chop began to run out." These reports are of interest as none of the standard bird books seem to list grain among the common foods of the Hairy Woodpecker. The Hairy Woodpecker was actually observed eating grain on the Hubbard farm last winter.

FUR NOT FEATHERS

Woodchuck. We continue to hear of Woodchucks (the Groundhog) becoming more abundant in southern sections of the province. A pair of these animals took up residence last summer in a field on the farm of Fred Harris, a few miles south of Yorkton. The burrow was in a small rise and they were frequently seen by passers-by from the highway. Mr. Harris decided however, that they might prove undesirable neighbors and accordingly shot them. The bad point about Woodchucks, from the farmer's point of view, is that their holes, and the mounds of earth which they excavate, are obstructions to cultivation and harvest operations. A.J. Breitung was telling us that at Tisdale, Woodchucks have become such a serious pest in recent years that the Rural Municipality offers a bounty of five cents for each animal and that in 1943 this bounty was paid on no less than 1092 Woodchucks.

Long-tailed Weasel. When the weasels turned color this Fall, the absence of snow made them a most conspicuous feature around the countryside. On Oct. 27 Mrs. Priestly watched one in almost immaculate white gambolling on the road alongside York Lake, apparently enjoying the unusually warm and summer-like weather as much as the observer was! As previously noted in the "Blue Jay", H.H. Pittman, Wauchope, had an article on the Long-tailed Weasel in the June-July issue of Nature Magazine (U.S. publication), which was illustrated by photographs taken by the author. Mr. Pittman is of the opinion that "Weasels are among the most graceful and courageous of our small animals, and go through life with an independence and singleness of purpose which is really admirable." While he agrees that the destruction of poultry by weasels is "deplorable", he points out that at the same time, "we must admit that their effect on the ground-squirrel population is of great importance."

An example of the fierce courage of the weasel was cited by H.S. Swallow, President of the Yorkton Fish & Game League, in his column in the "Yorkton Enterprise" - "I was told by W. Swanson of Theodore that while he was discing last summer, he could see a weasel which would dart in and out among the plants but which did not leave the vicinity. Gradually the disc came nearer and nearer to the small patch that was apparently the home of the small creature. When at last the time came to disc this piece, to Mr. Swanson's surprise the weasel attacked the rubber wheels of the tractor with the utmost ferocity, squealing and jumping at the huge mass of rubber with wide open mouth. It was an amazing exhibition of courage when the size of the tractor wheels in comparison with the size of the weasel is taken into consideration."

Lynx. It is not often the Lynx wanders out of its natural habitat in the northern woods, but this Fall we heard of two being killed in the settled areas further south. In September, L.B. Larson of Yorkton ran over one with his car near Balcarres and in October a very large specimen was shot with a 12 gauge shot gun by Bert Hipsley at his home east of Yorkton. When discovered about four o'clock in the afternoon this animal took to a tree, which is something which the Lynx apparently does only when cornered. The Lynx is a member of the cat family and lives mainly on rabbits. The relationship between rabbits and lynx has long been known and the saying "No rabbits, few lynx" is an old slogan of the northwoods trappers.

Badger. We are not in favor of the year-round open season on Badgers. Badgers are reported to have increased in numbers in many places in the southern part of the province. While we agree that any poultry-slaying badger must pay the penalty, we do not think it desirable that these animals should be indiscriminately killed when they occur in the wilder places. In the British Isles the Badger has been practically exterminated and now efforts are being made to preserve it as an interesting feature of the original fauna of Britain. We in Canada should do well to consider this point - if the Badger has a place in the crowded islands of Britain surely we can afford to keep him on our vast western plains!

DO YOU KNOW?

No. 3. The Canada Jay. The Canada Jay is an inhabitant of the north woods and is a familiar bird to campers at Waskesiu or Madge Lake. On the prairies it is only seen as an uncommon winter visitor - occasionally one will become a regular patron at a feeding station.

It may best be described as a fluffy grey bird with a white throat and forehead. Young Canada Jays are much darker and look "as if they had gone through a sooty chimney." During the summer months, parents and young roam through the woods in small family parties. The cheeky habits of the Canada Jay are well known to all woodsmen. Nothing around a camp which may prove edible is safe, even to soap, and hence its many popular names such as "Camp Robber", "Moose Bird", or "Meat Bird." Its most common popular name, "Whiskey Jack", has no alcoholic connection but comes from the name given it by the Indians, "Wiskedjak", meaning "meat bird".

Most interesting point about the Canada Jay is the fact that, in spite of living in the north woods, it is one of the earliest birds to nest. Often before February is out, Mrs. Canada Jay is incubating her eggs snug in a deep, thick-walled nest. Rabbit's wool, owl or grouse feathers, soft bark and moss all go into the construction of the nest to insulate it against the cold blasts of late winter. On March 17, 1944, M.G. Street, who hunts up one or more Canada Jay's nests at Nipawin each year, found a nest containing three young birds which he estimated to be about ten days old. By checking back, he discovered that they had probably hatched out on a day when the temperature skidded down to 27 degrees below zero!

- Isabel M. Priestly.

BOOKS.

The Manitoba Museum. Prepared by L.T.S. Norris-Elye, Director of the Museum. A small "brochure" giving a general description of the Manitoba Museum, its aims and achievements to date. Will be read with interest by all in Saskatchewan who wish to see our own Provincial Museum take its place as an active educational force in the province. Extremely well written and illustrated. Price 25 cents from the Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg.

Fishes of Manitoba. (By David Hinks). In addition to supplying a description of the fishes native to Manitoba, this book also gives much general information with regard to their distribution, food habits, economic value, etc. Illustrated. Will be almost equally useful for Saskatchewan. Price - postpaid - Paper cover, 60 cents; Cloth binding, \$1.00. Published by the Department of Mines & Resources, Province of Manitoba. (A tragic note in connection with this volume is that the author, a graduate of the University of Manitoba, was killed while serving with the R.C.A.F. in a night raid over Hamburg, one year before his book appeared in print.

Canadian Birds. (By L.L. Snyder and illustrated by T.M. Shortt). A booklet published recently by the magazine "Canadian Nature." Gives descriptions of 75 native birds, grouped according to the type of country in which they are most commonly found. Mr. Shortt's excellent pen and ink drawings prove that it is by no means necessary to have a colored picture to convey a realistic impression of any bird. Price 35 cents from Canadian Nature Magazine, 177 Jarvis St., Toronto.

WILD FLOWER PROTECTION. Several members expressed appreciation of Dorothy Morris's article in the last "Blue Jay". Mrs. E.W. Cates, McLean, comments: "I am glad you re-printed this article. Some of our flowers, especially the wild gentians and shooting stars are so few now, that many people do not know there ever were such lovely things." And G.F. Ledingham, Moose Jaw, writes: "It is too bad that our Saskatchewan floral emblem, the Red Lily, is gone and forgotten from so much of our province."

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SASKATCHEWAN BIRD BANDERS.

1. Wotherspoon Bros., HYAS. The Wotherspoon Brothers (Lindsay and Bill) of Hyas, Sask., first began banding in 1933 and since then have banded 885 birds. Their two best years were 1932 and 1938 when they banded 202 and 229 birds, respectively. Bands have been placed on 42 different species, the most unusual of which are: Leconte's Sparrow (9); Sharp-tailed (Nelson's) Sparrow (1); Lincoln's Sparrow (4); Pied-billed Grebe (1); Sprague's Pipit (1); Hermit Thrush (1) and Lapland Longspur (1).

Slate-colored Juncos top the Wotherspoon list with 377 individuals banded, followed by Purple Finch (114); House Wren (67); Robin (35); Song Sparrow (28); Goldfinch and White-throated Sparrow (25 each) and Crow (23).

Drop traps were used the first year, but since then Potter traps (when bird steps on bottom of trap, it trips the catch to shut door) and Government Sparrow Traps (with double funnel) have been used. Marsh Hawks, Crows and a number of songbirds have been banded as young in the nest.

Remarkable success has been had with Marsh Hawks. Out of 18 birds of this species banded, 7 have been heard from. Of a family consisting of three young banded on July 27, 1933, one was reported from New Orleans, La., Nov. 24, 1933; another from Beaumont, Texas, Dec. 20, 1934; and the third from Edna, Texas, on Oct. 21, 1935. Two birds of another family, banded July 7, 1933, were both heard from that fall - one at Archie, Mo., Sept. 9/33 and the other at Wynnewood, Okla., Nov. 11/33. Other Hyas marsh hawks were killed at Temple, Texas, and Davie, Fla.

The Wotherspoons' records produce additional evidence of the longevity of certain species. A chickadee banded Nov. 28, 1932, returned 5 years later to the same traps, Dec. 5, 1937. A crow banded June 25, 1933 was shot at Fulda, Sask. April 26/39, or nearly six years later. A Hairy Woodpecker banded Dec. 17, 1931 was recovered at nearby Lintlaw in the Fall of 1939, at which time it was at least eight years old.

An interesting record was the recovery of a Bronzed Grackle, banded May 4/34, which was caught in a muskrat trap only half a mile away, on May 10 of the next year. Crows have travelled to Sargent and Wisner, Neb., and Blanchard, Okla., while Robins have gone as far as Wells, Texas, and Hermitage, La.

For several years, due to pressure of farm work, the Wotherspoon Brothers have been unable to devote much time to banding. However, they hope to do even more in this, their favorite hobby, after the war.

2. Arthur Ward, BURNHAM. Mr. Arthur Ward, the Reeve of R.M. Coulee No. 136, has been banding since the fall of 1938, and has banded 198 birds of 32 species to date. He uses one trap only, which is 3' x 4' x 28" in size, and of the funnel type. A pail suspended above the trap provides a constant drip of water as an inducement to the birds, since Burnham is on the dry, bare prairie. The beautiful grounds around Mr. Ward's home have been responsible for attracting many shade-tree birds, which he otherwise could not have banded.

The more interesting species banded include Long-billed Curlew (1); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (2); Say's Phoebe (5); Ovenbird (1); Spotted Towhee (1); Lark Sparrow (1) and Bullock's Oriole (2). There have been few authentic records of the latter species in Saskatchewan, so it was quite an achievement to band two of these birds, which, according to Mr. Ward, were just visitors.

The greatest number of birds of any one species banded by Mr. Ward are Robins (56), with Tree Sparrows coming second (21), while Eastern Kingbirds and Barn Swallows - 12 each - share third place.

A Mallard, banded July 1, 1941, was shot at Mecca, California, on Nov. 29, 1941. A Brown Thrasher banded July 27, 1943 was found dead after a hailstorm near Lucky Lake, Sask., on June 23, 1944.

Two Robins re-trapped in 1942 had been banded by Mr. Ward in 1940 and 1941, while a Barn Swallow banded in 1941 returned to its nesting place in 1942. Other birds, with bands on their legs, are occasionally seen around the grounds but do not come into the trap to permit a check.

INFORMATION PLEASE

Some interesting notes appeared last October in the bird columns of the Winnipeg Free Press and the Winnipeg Tribune, on the marked increase in numbers of the Magpie in Manitoba and also its steady extension both east and ^{onward} west during the last few years. One of these handsome birds was even reported from Churchill this past summer. Within recent years the Magpie has certainly shown an increase in the Yorkton area and to many of the old-timers it is a newcomer in the district. M.G. Street also reported its appearance at Nipawin for the first time in 1935. However, according to the Winnipeg bird editors, it seems pretty well established that the magpie goes through rather widely separated cycles of abundance and scarcity coupled with alternating extension and retreat in range:- old Hudson Bay Company records show that the Magpie was noted at Fort York on Hudson Bay away back in the 1700's. We should like any other comment on this matter.

An unusually large number of Mountain Bluebirds were seen in migration all through the country west of Yorkton this fall. J.R. Foreman reports seeing flock after flock of these lovely birds the first week in October, east of Watson and north to Tisdale. One thing which has long puzzled us is, where do the Bluebirds which we see in migration nest? We get so few summer records of this species. Is there some favoured area in the wooded country north and east of us? Or are they dispersed over the whole country and, being as Mrs. Hubbard said of the Eastern Bluebirds which she had nesting in her yard this summer, "such unobtrusive birds" that they escape notice?

How common is the Porcupine in the southern part of the province? A porcupine was seen on the beach at Devil's Lake early last spring. Yorkton fishermen noted one at Round Lake in June and members of the Regina Natural History Society came across evidence of a porcupine in the form of quills, in a coulee much further west along the Qu'Appelle valley. The variety of the Canadian Porcupine common to Saskatchewan seems to be the Eastern or Black-haired Porcupine although the Yellow-haired Porcupine probably occurs in the southern and western sections of the province. More information is needed regarding the distribution of porcupines in the southern part of the prairie provinces and the National Museum at Ottawa would like to get skins and skulls from this area. We note however, that Dr. R.M. Anderson of the National Museum admits that "porcupines are awkward things to handle and this has retarded building up a series of specimens and their study!"

To most sportsmen and farmers the Great Horned Owl is "Tiger of the Air" of which no good can be said, so it was interesting to read the following remarks in Marion Nixon's column "Nature" in the Saskatchewan Farmer -

"Before you are guilty of slaughtering Great Horned Owls which have nested in your neighborhood consider whether to your knowledge they merit such destruction. Would not the rats, mice and rabbits which form such a large part of their diet far outweigh any loss in game birds? As far as the loss of domestic poultry is concerned I am sure we have lost far more to rats than we ever have to owls."

Horned Owls undoubtedly destroy many game birds and are a real menace to poultry allowed to run at night or roost in trees, but on the other hand it is one of the few birds which prey on skunks and is one of the worst enemies of the crow. We should like some comment. As we have reiterated many times in the "Blue Jay", predation is so often not what it seems on the surface or at first glance and is a subject needing a far more unbiased approach than it has received from the general public in the past.

Will members please let us have any records of the Burrowing Owl noted north of the C.P.R. main line.

1944 CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS

In spite of extremely severe weather thirteen Christmas Bird Censuses were made, giving a count of 35 species and approximately 4000 individuals. This is four more species than were listed in 1943 and 1942, counts which both rated 30 species. Eight birds not noted in either of the two previous counts were seen this year, these being the American Rough-legged Hawk, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Raven, Nuthatch, Robin, Starling, Red-winged Blackbird, and Song Sparrow.

Some interesting points have been brought out by this season's census. The Black-capped Chickadee and the Magpie head the list as appearing in 12 of the 13 lists. The fact that the Magpie is so widely dispersed over the province is not welcome news. Redpolls which last year were the most frequently seen species, this year were almost entirely out of the picture and were only reported from Skull Creek in the southwest and from Benito just a few miles inside the Manitoba boundary on the northeast.

By the way, it is most interesting to compare the list sent in from Skull Creek by Steve Mann with those from Nipawin, Torch River or Benito - the one from the western plains and the others from the northwoods. It should also be noted that although Tree Sparrows and Horned Larks would be regarded as "wintering summer birds" in most sections of the province, at Skull Creek they regularly remain on during the winter. No Short-eared Owls were reported this year. Game birds seem generally scarce, as do Snowy Owls. No Evening Grosbeaks were seen further south than Wallwort (south of Tisdale).

So far, our three Christmas Censuses have produced a list of 42 different species of birds seen in Saskatchewan in mid-winter.

Benito, Man. Dec. 26. Distance covered, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles on foot through open and wooded country. Goshawk, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 1; Sharp-tailed Grouse, 1; Hungarian Partridge, 9; Great Horned Owl, 2; Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Downy Woodpecker, 1; Blue Jay, 2; Magpie, 2; Raven, 1; Black-capped Chickadee, 2; Evening Grosbeak, 2; Pine Grosbeak, 30; Redpoll, 19; Snow Bunting, 64. Total, 15 species, 140 individuals. - A. ISFELD.

Grenfell, Sask. Jan. 7. Area covered: a circuit of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles by two observers on foot across stubble fields and pasture broken by bluffs. Also 22 miles by car on Highway No. 47, later on same day. Temperature -10° at start, -14° later; about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches of fresh snow. Hungarian Partridge, 14; Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Magpie, 5; Black-capped Chickadee, 15; English Sparrow, 50. Total, 6 species, 86 individuals. Sharp-tailed Grouse, Ruffed Grouse and Snow Buntings have been seen recently. A Meadowlark has stayed so far through the winter, and is seen on a spot on No. 47 highway - it was last seen Jan. 6. -MR. AND MRS. JOHN HUBBARD, JR.

Hawarden, Sask. (open prairie). Dec. 28; 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Raw SE wind, Temp. 5° . Mallard, 1 (female, wintering with tame ducks, and staying by flowing artesian well); English Sparrow, 100 (est.); Snow Bunting, 175 (est.). Total 3 species, approximately 276 individuals. A Golden Eagle flew over, Dec. 26. -HAROLD KVINGE.

Indian Head, Sask. Distance covered, 12 blocks. Time spent out, $\frac{3}{4}$ hour. Temperature -15° . Magpie, 1; Black-capped Chickadee, 3; Bohemian Waxwing, 11; Starling, 1. Total, 4 species, 16 individuals. -BILL WILSON.

Raymore, Sask. Dec. 28. Distance covered, one mile on foot. Weather cold and windy. Downy Woodpecker, 1; Magpie, 7; Black-capped Chickadee, 5. Total, 3 species, 13 individuals. -MISS E.K. JONES.

1944 CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS (continued)

Nipawin, Sask. (through town of Nipawin, and south along east bank of Saskatchewan River). Dec. 24; 1.15 p.m. to 4.45 p.m. Clear, bright day; Wind, W to NW, 10 to 15 mph; 8 to 10 inches of snow. Temp. -15° at start and finish. 1 observer afoot. Total hours afield, $3\frac{1}{2}$; total mileage, $4\frac{1}{2}$. Goshawk, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 1; Sharp-tailed Grouse, 5; Great Horned Owl, 1; Pileated Woodpecker, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 2; American Three-toed Woodpecker, 2; Canada Jay, 2; Blue Jay, 16; Magpie, 4; Raven, 2; Black-capped Chickadee, 11; Hudsonian Chickadee, 2; Bohemian Waxwing, 15; Common Starling, 2; English Sparrow, 300 (est.); Evening Grosbeak, 3; Pine Grosbeak, 9. Total, 18 species, approximately 379 individuals. - MAURICE G. STREET.

Scott, Sask. January 1. Two miles covered on foot, "near planted trees and hedges of Experimental Farm all the way." Weather calm, bright sunshine, temperature -7° . Sharp-tailed Grouse, 2; Hungarian Partridge, 35; Magpie, 2; Black-capped Chickadee, 6; English Sparrow, 65; Snow Bunting, 80. Total, 6 species, 190 individuals. - F. ROUSE.

Skull Creek, Sask. (Birds recorded from day to day between Christmas and New Year, around the ranch and driving into town). Goshawk, 2; American Rough-legged Hawk, 2; Golden Eagle, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 2; Sharp-tailed Grouse, 7; Hungarian Partridge, 46; Pheasant, 1; Great Horned Owl, 4; Downy Woodpecker, 1; Horned Lark, 23; Magpie, 27; Black-capped Chickadee, 5; Robin, 1; Bohemian Waxwing, 700; English Sparrow, 108; Tree Sparrow, 14; Song Sparrow, 2; Redpoll, 5; Snow Bunting, 8. Total, 19 species, approximately 959 individuals. - STEVE A. MANN.

Torch River, Sask. Birds seen around barn-yard and fields between Dec. 25 and Dec. 31. First occurrence of each species recorded. Weather cloudy and very cold, lowest temperature -35° , highest temp. 2° . Sharp-tailed Grouse, 9; Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Canada Jay, 3; Blue Jay, 2; Magpie, 4; Raven, 2; Black-capped Chickadee, 2; Northern Shrike, 1; English Sparrow, 20; Evening Grosbeak, 14; Pine Grosbeak, 11; Snow Bunting, 7. (The Shrike was daily raiding the flock of English Sparrows). Total, 12 species, 76 individuals. - C. STUART FRANCIS.

Tullis, Sask. (fields $\frac{1}{2}$ mile E. and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles N. of Tullis, together with trip to Hitchcock Coulee and the South Saskatchewan River, 10 miles E. of Tullis.) Dec. 27; 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Overcast; Wind, light, E; 1 inch of snow. Temp. 2° at start, 4° at return. 4 observers in two groups. Total party hours afield, 7 ($1\frac{1}{2}$ by car, $5\frac{1}{2}$ on foot); total party miles, 32 (22 by car, 10 on foot). American Rough-legged Hawk, 1 (noted flying over coulee, identity positive); Ruffed Grouse, 2; Sharp-tailed Grouse, 8; Hungarian Partridge, 16; Snowy Owl, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 2; American Magpie, 5; Black-capped Chickadee, 20; English Sparrow, 105 (est.); Snow Bunting, 1. Total, 10 species, approximately 161 individuals. - L.J. ROY, WARREN S. ROY, MRS. LILLIAN VERRAULT, J. FRANCIS ROY.

Wallwort, Sask. (Through heavy timber and second growth) - Jan. 1; 7 inches of snow; light N.W. wind; Temperature -16° at start, -12° at finish; about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles covered on foot, one observer. Hawk, unidentified, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 3; Great Horned Owl, 2; Hairy Woodpecker, 5; Pileated Woodpecker, 2; Canada Jay, 1; Blue Jay, 4; Magpie, 4; Black-capped Chickadee, 11; Nuthatch (White-breasted? -Ed.), 4; English Sparrow, 10; Evening Grosbeak, 11; Pine Grosbeak, 7. Total, 13 species, 65 individuals. - JOHN D. RITCHIE.

Walseley, Sask. (In garden and around country close to town.) Christmas. Ring-necked Pheasant, 2; Downy Woodpecker, 5; Magpie, 15; Black-capped Chickadee, 6; Bohemian Waxwing, 50; Starling, 20; English Sparrow, 25. Total, 7 species, 123 individuals. - JOHN R. GARDEN.

1944 CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS (continued)

Yorkton, Sask. (area 15 miles in diameter, with Yorkton as center). - Dec. 26; 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Clear, bright day, cloudy in late afternoon; Wind NW, about 8 mph; only slight sprinkling of snow on fields. Temp. -8° at start, 6° at finish. 12 observers in 6 groups. Total party hours afield, 10 (5 by car and 5 on foot); total party miles, $53\frac{1}{2}$ (47 by car and $6\frac{1}{2}$ on foot). Goshawk, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 2; Sharp-tailed Grouse, 39; Hairy Woodpecker, 2; Downy Woodpecker, 1; Blue Jay, 1; American Magpie, 3; Black-capped Chickadee, 17; Bohemian Waxwing, 39; English Sparrow, 525 (est.); Snow Bunting, 877 (est.). Total, 11 species, approximately 1507 individuals. One dead Hungarian Partridge found on road during census. Snowy Owl noted Dec. 25; Great Horned Owl, Dec. 28. Pine Grosbeak, Dec. 28. American Robin seen at close range by three observers, Dec. 27 and 28. Red-winged Blackbird seen Dec. 22 and Dec. 31. This bird is still around (Jan. 27). - RAY ADAM, VERNON BARNES, NEIL BLACK, JACK BROWNEE, W.A. BROWNEE, BROTHER CLARENCE, C. STUART HOUSTON, DR. S.C. HOUSTON, MRS. J. MEEKMA, MICHAEL PRIESTLY, MRS. I.M. PRIESTLY, MR. AND MRS. C.C. SHAW (members Yorkton Natural History Society).

Note: GAME BIRDS. As already stated, game birds seem generally down in number all over the province, but some notes on conditions in different localities may be of interest. In the Yorkton area the Christmas Bird Census shows the Sharp-tailed Grouse or "Prairie Chicken" to be holding its own, the count from 1940-1944 inclusive being, 25, 22, 28, 39. On the other hand, Hungarian Partridges show a marked falling off according to our counts, from 133 in 1941 to nil this year. However, several of the farmers of the district report knowledge of good-sized flocks around, so the picture may not be so black after all.

The Sharp-tail is reported as definitely being down in numbers, at Grenfell, Wolseley, Hawarden, Nipawin, Skull Creek and other points. John R. Garden, writing from Wolseley, states - "Prairie Chicken have all but disappeared; a five year closed season for these birds should be in order." And from Skull Creek, Steve A. Mann reports - "Prairie Chicken have been very scarce this year, even during the hunting season. Everyone in these parts has noticed the same thing." "On the other hand," he says, "the Huns are noticeably more numerous. Possibly this can be accounted for by the fact that hunters could only obtain two boxes of shot gun ammunition and left the Huns alone in favor of easier game."

The Ring-neck Pheasant, now well established in the southern part of the province, seems making its way northward. Several have been seen in the Yorkton area this past Fall. Mrs. J. Hubbard, Jr. reports that Pheasants are "moving into the Grenfell district" and Mr. Garden says many flocks have been seen close to the town of Wolseley this Fall.

Mr. Garden also writes of seeing about fourteen Chukar Partridge, the first record of such birds since some were liberated in the Wolseley district four years ago. He asks - "Have you any idea how Chukars are doing all over the province? It would be interesting to hear."

PROVINCIAL BIRD EMBLEM.

We failed to mention in our last issue of the "Blue Jay" that the Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Pediacetes phasianellus*), commonly known as the "Prairie Chicken" was the bird selected by the greatest number of our members as their choice for a provincial bird emblem. The "Sharp-tail" was also the bird picked for this honor by the Regina Natural History Society and the Saskatchewan Fish & Game League. We shall be forwarding a letter recommending it as such to Hon. J.L. Phelps, before the next session of the Provincial Legislature. While admitting that many other birds suggested by members had a good claim to suitability we think most people will agree that the Sharp-tail is a typical western bird and well worthy of taking its place beside Saskatchewan's floral emblem, the Red Lily.

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